DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 077 CS 013 985

AUTHOR	Moore-Hart, Margaret; Karabenick, Stuart A.
TITLE	Becoming Successful Readers: A Volunteer Tutoring Program for Culturally Diverse Students.
PUB DATE	2000-04-00
NOTE	18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cross Age Teaching; *Diversity (Student); Elementary Education; Higher Education; Program Evaluation; *Reading Achievement; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Improvement; Reading Research; *Reading Strategies; *Student Volunteers; *Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS	AmeriCorps; Michigan; Program Objectives

ABSTRACT

A study examined how culturally diverse students increased their reading/writing performance through a structured volunteer tutoring program. Two university professors developed volunteer tutoring programs at six elementary schools in southeastern Michigan. Program objectives were to: (1) increase the reading performance of culturally diverse students; (2) improve their attitudes toward reading; and (3) evaluate the program's efficacy. Tutees consisted of 291 elementary students, ages 6 to 10 years, who were reading below grade level. Tutors included 27 AmeriCorps volunteers (university students) who were culturally diverse, economically varied, and diversified in age and gender. After a minimum of two training sessions, tutors began conducting 30-minute one-to-one sessions either two or four times per week. During this time, they read multicultural literature with the children and questioned them interactively for 15 to 20 minutes. During the remainder of the session, they conducted word building strategies to reinforce knowledge of letter-sound relationships or word recognition activities to reinforce fluency. In addition, they engaged in reading/writing activities, such as choral readings, readers' theater, or journal writing. Findings showed greatest gains for second and third graders, but the sessions benefited all students. Data suggest that such a cost-effective program could be instituted to increase the literacy of diverse school populations. (Contains 13 tables, 2 figures, and 12 references.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

SCOPE OF INTEREST NOTICE

The ERIC Facility has assigned this document for processing to: CS

In our judgment, this document is also of interest to the Clearinghouses noted to the right. Indexing should reflect their special points of view. TM

ED 443 077

Becoming Successful Readers: A Volunteer Tutoring Program for Culturally Diverse Students

Margaret Moore-Hart
Department of Teacher Education
Eastern Michigan University

and

Stuart A. Karabenick
Department of Psychology
Eastern Michigan University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

M. Moore-Hart

Presented at the April, 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. Correspondence should be addressed to Margaret Moore-Hart at the above address, or email: ted_moore@online.emich.edu

CS 013 985

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Overview

This study examines how culturally diverse students increase their reading/writing performance through a structured volunteer tutoring program. In response to President Clinton's commitment that every child will read independently and well by the end of third grade, two university professors developed a volunteer tutoring program in six elementary schools in southeast Michigan. The objectives of the program were to: (1) increase the reading performance of culturally diverse students, (2) improve their attitudes toward reading, and (3) evaluate the program's efficacy.

Theoretical Framework and Purpose

Recent interest in the America Reads Challenge has influenced educators and administrators to develop quality volunteer tutoring programs within elementary schools. Historically, research suggests that tutoring produces both affective and academic gains for both tutor and tutee (Gartner, Koher, & Riessman, 1971; Topping, 1987; Wagner, 1982). In their meta-analysis of 65 studies, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik (1982) report that tutors make significant gains in achievement and attitudes toward school. Similarly, in an analysis of 10 later studies, Topping (1987) found that tutors and tutees, regardless of their respective academic backgrounds, demonstrated gains in reading achievement. More recent research supports this tendency toward reading gains, even in tutors who are low-achieving readers (Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Labbo & Teale, 1990; Morrow, 1998; Pinnell & Griffith, 1995; Schumm, 1999).

As interest in volunteer tutoring programs increases, Wasik (1997) emphasizes the need to evaluate their efficacy. In their study of five tutoring programs that used certified teachers and paraprofessionals, Wasik and Slavin (1993) reported that one-to-one tutoring is extremely effective and that certified teachers as tutors have a larger effect than do paraprofessionals. Morrow and Walker (1998) further found that volunteers who were highly trained and who participated in a highly structured program with specific manuals, student materials, and training procedures had positive effects on the literacy development of students. In a recent review of the research on tutoring programs, Wasik (1997) listed four factors that are related to successful tutoring programs: (1) a certified teacher to coordinate the program, (2) continuous feedback to the tutors on their tutoring sessions, (3) high-quality training for the tutors, and (4) structured tutoring sessions.

Hundreds of grassroots volunteer tutoring programs are currently being implemented across the nation. However, many tutoring programs do not present evidence of effectiveness or they present evidence with obvious sources of bias (Wasik, 1997). The purpose of the present study, therefore, was to examine the effects of a volunteer tutoring program on the reading achievement and reading attitudes of culturally diverse students.

Method

Participants

The tutees consisted of 291 elementary students who were reading below grade level, ages 6 to 10 years, at five elementary schools in southeastern Michigan, with the following characteristics: (1) culturally diverse with a large number of African Americans, (2) economically varied with a large number living in poverty; and (3) diversified with respect to gender. All tutees were reading below grade level. The tutors included 27 AmeriCorps volunteers (university students) who were: (1) culturally diverse (14 European-American, 2 Asian American, 2 Arab American, and 9 African American), (2) economically varied, and (3) diversified with respect to age and gender. All tutors were students attending a local university.

Materials

The materials included a tutorial manual for each tutor, multicultural books, and tutoring folders for each tutee. The tutorial manual, which outlined tutoring methods and guidelines, consisted of reading/writing activities to be used with the multicultural books and specific literacy strategies for tutors to follow during the tutoring sessions. The tutoring folder included reading and writing record sheets, a word bank, lesson plans, a packet of letter cards, and comment sheets. Tutors tracked the number of books read by the tutee, the number of new words tutees learned, and obtained writing samples. The tutoring folders provided a way to communicate tutor observations and to record daily progress of the tutee.

Training Sessions

AmeriCorps tutors attended weekly 90-minute training sessions during which the project director and the literacy coordinator discussed tutoring methods and guidelines, and modeled literacy strategies that the tutors practiced in small groups. After seeing the strategies modeled, the tutors practiced the techniques during simulated sessions or within small groups. Importantly, tutors had opportunities to share and discuss problems or successes during their training sessions. Tutors also received training on cultural diversity issues, children living in poverty, and related issues. In addition to their weekly training, tutors received on-site training and coaching as they worked with their tutees. The literacy coordinator provided feedback, offered suggestions or comments about the tutoring sessions, modeled strategies, and provided assistance as needed.

Tutoring Sessions

After a minimum of two training sessions, tutors began conducting 30-minute one-to-one sessions either twice or four times per week. During this time, they read multicultural literature with the children and asked questions interactively for 15 to 20 minutes. During the remainder of the session, they conducted word building strategies to reinforce knowledge of letter-sound relationships or word recognition activities to reinforce fluency. In addition, tutors engaged in reading/writing activities such as LEA choral readings, readers' theater, or journal writing during the first 10 to 20 minutes.

Evaluation

Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained over one school year, including: (1) students' reading-related attitudes and performance changes as assessed by the Spieglipz Informal Reading Inventory, and teachers' grade reports, (2) parent and teacher observations of students' reading and writing attitudes, performance in the program, and program benefits, and (3) tutor and tutee structured and semi-structured interviews. It should be noted that although the evaluation did not include a no-treatment control group, program benefits over and above maturation were indicated by a frequency of tutoring session effect, that is, greater gains were expected for students tutored four times compared to those tutored twice per week.

Results

Implementation Evaluation of Tutoring Program

To gain more information about program implementation, observation and interview data were obtained from multiple sources—including the program director, literacy coordinator, principals, teachers, project staff, and tutors. Data consistently indicated that tutors were implementing the tutoring program as designed. Emerging themes from observational data suggest that tutors were interactively reading the multicultural books with their tutees, modeling expression and fluency, and asking questions to reinforce comprehension. Similarly, the themes and patterns from the structured interviews indicate that tutors were also using the strategies and activities modeled during their training sessions. For example, tutors wrote LEA stories with their tutees, helped tutees write poems or stories using the writing process, or used choral readings of texts to increase fluency and expression. Table 1 lists the strategies tutors used during the tutoring sessions according to informal observations. Tables 2 and 3 list strategies that tutors used during the tutoring sessions according to the structured interviews.

Reading Performance

Spieglipz Informal Reading Inventory scores obtained at the beginning and end of the year were used to determine the effects of the tutoring program on reading performance. Most generally, there was an average (mean) increase of 1.5 grade equivalents in reading level across all students in the program. This increase is both statistically greater than 0 (i.e., no change), $t(171) = 14.09$, $p < .0001$, and also significantly greater than a grade increase of 1 ($t(171) = 4.55$, $p < .0001$), which would be the expected increase for normal readers during one school. As shown in Figure 1, despite the fact that these were poor readers at the outset, 71% of the students increased one or more grades, and 45% more than two reading grades by the end of the year.

To provide greater effect specificity, as well as to test for higher-order interactions, ANOVAs were conducted with change in reading grade equivalents as the dependent variable. A 2 (Tutoring

Frequency) X 5 (Grade) indicated, most importantly, that doubling the number of weekly tutoring sessions resulted in significantly greater reading improvement, $F(4,162) = 5.87$, $p < .02$. Furthermore, the absence of a significant Tutoring Frequency X Grade interaction indicates that the effect of Tutoring Frequency did not differ as a function of grade, as shown in Figure 2. There were, however, grade differences in improvement, $F(4,162) = 2.59$, $p < .04$, with greater gains for 2nd and 3rd than for 1st, 4th, or 5th graders (as indicated by posts hoc tests at $\alpha = .05$). Additional statistical analysis confirmed that the amount of improvement was not related to the school attended, race/ethnicity, or gender, nor did these characteristics moderate improvement as a function of grade or tutoring frequency. Accordingly, the tutoring program appears to be equally beneficial across all of these groups.

Teacher Reports

Consistent with Informal Reading Inventory scores, teachers' grade reports revealed that the program-targeted reading performance of 70% of the students increased from 1st to 3rd markings, compared to 50% in math, 38% in science, 35% in social studies, and 29% in English. Teachers also stated that 70% had improved their reading performance and 70% their reading attitudes because of the program. The findings further reveal that teachers believed that 82% benefited from the program. Teachers consistently reported, "Having one-on-one tutoring has really helped my students improve their reading." They also commented that the children loved going to the tutoring sessions. In fact, "Others want to go, too!" Tables 4, 5, and 6 list representative changes in students' behaviors according to the principals and teachers.

Parent Reports

A phone survey indicated that parents (usually mothers) were even more definite in their view of the program's benefits. Almost all (93%) believed that the program had improved their children's reading skills and 83% believed that their children's attitudes improved toward reading; 97% claimed that their child had benefited from the program. Not reflected in these "cold" statistics, however, was parents' considerable and overwhelming enthusiasm for the program and its value for their children as voiced in their interviews. For example, parents shared "My daughter used to watch TV more. Now reading is part of her routine" or "My son is no longer worried about reading. He like to read more often and chooses longer, more complicated books." Tables 9 and 10 list representative comments from the parents and their perceptions about changes in their children's behaviors.

And what do the tutors themselves say?

Structured interviews reveal that all tutors believed that one-on-one tutoring helped their tutees improve their reading and their attitudes toward reading. They similarly reported that their tutees loved going to the tutoring sessions (see Table 9). They also confirmed that parents were very appreciative and supportive of the program. In addition, tutors felt that the tutoring experience

helped them grow professionally and increased their commitment to volunteerism and community service. For example, one tutor shared, "I've worked with a lot of kids from diverse settings. I learned a lot about them, how to work with them." Another commented, "I am going into social work...It will help me a lot." Tables 10 and 11 list representative quotes from the tutors.

And what do the children themselves say?

Structured interviews indicate generally that students responded positively to their tutors, and that feeling extended to both reading and writing. They seem appreciative about having been helped, and there is a sense that they looked forward to and enjoyed the sessions. For example, one student shared, "Reading is better for me because I read better. I know more words because of the tutor." When asked specifically about how they felt about reading, they responded in terms such as "Reading is joyful...", "Good", "Kinda great", "I feel happy about it, and I feel good inside", "Happy and stuff", and "I like reading." Similar responses were elicited to questions about writing. Figures 14 and 15 demonstrate the students' feelings and responses to the tutoring experience according to the interviews.

Conclusions and Implications

Results indicate one-to-one tutoring that consists of reading, practicing word recognition and word building strategies promoted the reading performance of culturally diverse elementary school students who would otherwise not have received such focused attention. Furthermore, with increases in the frequency of weekly tutoring sessions, greater benefits were obtained. The findings further show greatest gains for 2nd and 3rd graders, emphasizing the need to begin tutoring programs at an early age. Importantly, these benefits were independent of ethnic/racial and gender categories.

Teacher and parent observations were consistent with performance data, suggesting that the program benefited children's reading (and writing) performance and attitudes. Similar to earlier studies, the findings indicate that the benefits of the program extend to the children being tutored as well as to the tutor.

Data suggest, therefore, that such a cost-effective program could be instituted to increase the literacy of diverse school populations. If funds are to be allocated for volunteer programs, however, there is a need to study how volunteers can be used most effectively and what kinds of literacy activities they can successfully use with their students. Additional studies are necessary to more completely specify the necessary and sufficient components of a tutoring program and its training program to ensure the greatest probability of program replicability. These studies will heighten the possibilities of increasing literacy learning of our nation's children.

References

Table 1. Observations of Tutoring Behavior

All Tutors:
Read with their tutees, modeling expression and fluency
Read stories with their tutees, asking questions in order to reinforce comprehension of stories
Practiced word recognition strategies with their tutees using flash cards and the "power ring" in their tutee folders
Practiced word building strategies with their tutees using the letter cards provided in their tutee folders
Many tutors also:
Wrote Language Experience Stories with tutees
Helped tutees write poems using writing process
Helped tutees write narrative or expository texts using writing process

Table 2. Strategies Tutors Used to Support Literacy Learning of Tutees According to Focused Interviews

Used praise and encouragement to support the reader
Modeled enthusiasm and a love for reading
Used a positive attitude to support the reader
Remained patient with the tutee
Helped children increase their self-esteem
Provided children with successful experiences
Helped children grow to love books and reading
Selected books that matched children's interests
Allowed children opportunities to choose books to read
Planned the tutoring session to be fun and interesting
Used a sense of humor during the tutoring session

Table 3. Strategies Tutors Used to Improve Reading/Writing Performance of Tutees According to Focused Interviews

Read aloud interactively so that tutor and tutee both read
Asked questions as they read with the tutee
Encouraged tutees to predict what would happen next in stories
Built background knowledge about a story or topic before reading
Talked about the story and its meaning
Used story mapping to help children understand stories
Related the story to the tutee's experiences
Selected books that are part of children's cultural background
Used choral reading or reader's theater while reading together
Used music or rap as they read stories
Helped tutees use the context or picture s to figure out new words
Talked about the meaning of words
Used the letter cards to help children practice phonics
Played word games to help them recognize words
Practiced words using the "power ring"
Used the Language Experience Approach
Encouraged tutee to use temporary spelling as they wrote
Helped tutees write about their own experiences
Helped tutees write their own stories
Helped tutees write poems
Helped tutees write letters

Table 4. Tutoring and Its Impact on Students' Reading/Writing Performance According to Principals

"This has been a tremendously successful program. The children in my school are reading and writing better. I know that AmeriCorps is reason we are seeing this change."
"The children in my school have improved the MEAP scores. Thank you for helping us improve."
"Our school has benefited from AmeriCorps being in our school."
"The teachers liked that fact that our students are receiving more instruction in reading."
"According to my teachers, students have increased their interest in reading."
"The AmeriCorps staff has been top-notch. Our students and staff have benefited from their being in our school."
"The after-school literacy clubs have promoted reading and writing in our school."
"The after-school literacy clubs have shown students a way to enjoy reading and writing."

Table 5. Impact of Tutoring on Students' Reading/Writing Performance According to Teachers

98% said positive things about the tutoring sessions.
70% improved their reading performance, reading with less assistance or reading higher level books.
70% improved their reading attitudes.
53% improved their writing performance.
52% improved their writing attitudes.
58% are motivated to read more books.
38% improved their performance in school.
82% benefited from the program.

Table 6. Quotes from Teachers About Students' Changes in Reading/Writing Performance

"Having one-on-one tutoring has really helped my students improve their reading."
"My students have a more positive attitude about reading as a result of the tutoring program."
"My students love to go the tutoring session. Others want to go, too!"
"The tutoring program gives the children another opportunity to read to someone. They enjoy that."
"She seems to read more and expresses herself in writing better."
"My students are writing more stories that are longer with more details."
"The tutors are great. They always have a smile on their faces, a real positive attitude. They also care for all the children and wanted all the children to feel successful."
"The media center books are checked out more often. Students are reading for pleasure, as well as for information."

Table 7. Tutoring and Its Impact on Students' Reading/Writing Performance According to Parents

92% said positive things about the tutoring sessions.
93% improved their reading performance, reading with less assistance or reading higher level books.
81% improved their reading attitudes.
70% improved their writing performance.
66% improved their writing attitudes.
54% are motivated to read more books.
97% benefited from the program.

Table 8. Quotes from Parents About Changes in Children's Reading/Writing Performance

"Having one-on-one tutoring has been great for my child."
"Thanks for your help in assisting my daughter in reading. I really appreciate it."
"My daughter reads now without any prompting."
"My daughter used to watch TV more. Now reading is part of her routine."
"My daughter writes pages and pages now."
"My son is reading better now and he feels better about himself."
"My son is no longer worried about reading. He likes to read more often and chooses longer, more complicated books."

Table 9. Tutoring and Its Impact on Students' Reading/Writing Performance According to Tutors

"One day I had a child that didn't want to come to me...One day he came in and grabbed a book and came right to me...He was so excited to read with me he came right to the Center...And so, that was the first time that I really realized that we were making an impact and doing a very good thing"
"There's no way that you can work with the kids and talk to their mothers and parents and grandparents and not really feel it and appreciate how lucky you are and you need to turn that luck around and really help someone out."
"I think [the parents] like the program. They can't always be there for their child, whether it's because of working three jobs, they have more kids at home. But I think they appreciate what we're doing, helping their kids."
"I had three parents who actually called me by name. Some of the parents would come over and we would talk, but more so this year. The parents would realize what I was trying to do and were very supportive."
"I think we're really a positive impact and a force in the community. I know we are because the community liaison police officer will come and tell us statistics like crime has dropped since our program started and the kids are definitely excited and they keep coming so I know that we're doing a good job when I keep seeing the same children."

Table 10. Tutoring and Its Influence on the Professional Development of Tutors

"We learned about how to alleviate the social problems through community service, the community centers, the homeless problem."

"I learned a lot about the students and the families, especially in the African-American culture. I've seen how what we are doing makes a difference in the children's' lives and the families they come from, the community as a whole."

"I think interacting with the kids and adults that I met made me a better professional."

"I've worked with a lot of kids from diverse settings. I learned a lot about them, how to work with them."

"I plan to be a teacher so it's obvious how it's going to help me. But, outside the classroom, I think it's going to help me to get a lot of school programs started—not just 8:00-300. Do a lot of community service or special projects afterwards, which would run to six o'clock."

"If I do school social work in that I've talked with parents and I know what the kids are going through. I have a good sense of the community that they live in."

"I am going into social work...It will help me a lot..And there again as a professional I want to help."

"It has actually given me a direction...my ultimate goal is to direct a program like CLASS. So it has completely switched my focus on what I think is important."

"I'm trying to learn more about the other things you do---the proposals and funding and that type of thing. I'm trying to learn more office type things because although I am an education major, I don't know that I am going to teach."

"It will help me so much I can't recommend it enough. Just getting out and meeting people, just networking...Like I said, everything about the classroom. I enjoyed...working with children is just great."

"I just think AmeriCorps a great program. I just wanted to say that for the record. I think it's wonderful."

Table 11. Influence of Volunteerism on the Lives of Tutors

"I plan to continue with community service. Before I thought I'd like to work in an urban setting, but now I'm almost positive I want to work in an urban setting."
"Providing a service, I'll be honest with you, was something I was very reluctant to do. But now it's something I want to do. There hasn't been a burning bush or anything, but it's just something within me. ..I don't know. it's just a great feeling."
"[Community service] is definitely an obligation. We're all obligated to serve communities, whether it is the one we came from or the one you live in now."
"There is no greater gift than you can give back to a community than just volunteer service."
"When I was in school there were all kinds of people who came in and volunteered and helped out. As a person who can now volunteer, I can now give that back. Also to teach your own kids to want to help people and do it out of their heart and not do it for money."
"[Community service] is very valuable...I learned a lot of stuff from these kids that I can take on with me now and in the future, either with my kids in the classroom or if I have kids in a couple of years."
"People should volunteer their time to serve their community, whether it be helping the kids, the homeless. I mean whatever, just anything where you're doing something to help other people instead of thinking about yourself."

Table 12. Tutoring and Its Impact on Students' Reading/Writing Performance According to Children

"I'm reading harder books--yellow, red, now I am reading green."
"I can read better now. She showed me how to sound it out and if I don't get it she takes a card and writes it on the card and tells me it."
"Reading is better for me because I read better. I know more words because of the tutor."
"It has changed. I can really read now. I can read a lot of words, and I couldn't read a lot of words before."
"I like to read with my tutors and every day when I have to see them, I always think what's the word they read to me yesterday."

Table 13. Quotes from Tutees On Their Feelings About Reading and Writing

"I feel happy about reading."
"Reading is joyful."
"I feel good inside."
"Happy and stuff."
"I like reading."
"I like writing."
"I feel happy about reading and good inside."

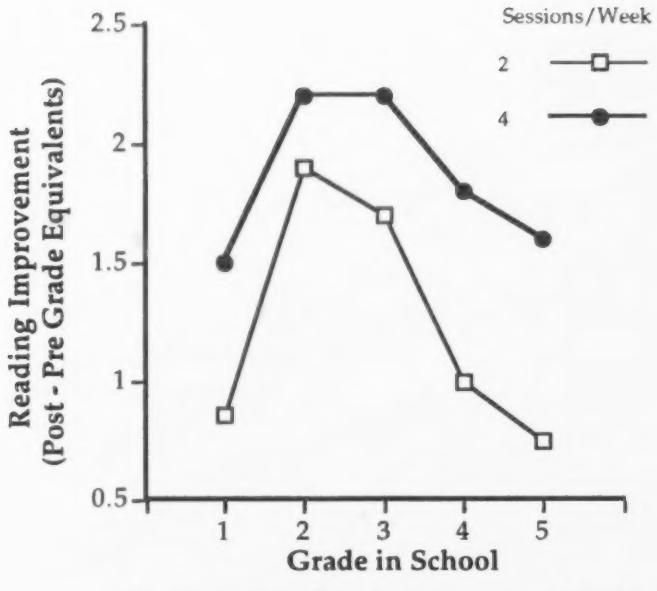

Figure 1. Reading improvement (grade equivalents) as a function of grade in school and number of tutoring sessions per week

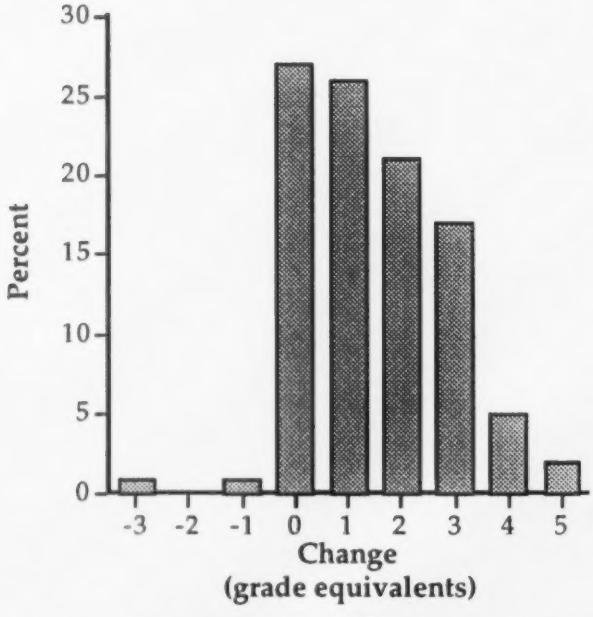

Figure 2. Reading Level Changes From Beginning to End of Year

References

Cohen, P. Kulki, J., & Kulik, C. (1982). Education outcomes of tutoring: A meta-analysis of findings. *American Educational Research Journal, 19*, 237-248.

Gartner, A., Kohler, M., & Riessman, F. (1971*). Children teach children: Learning by teaching.* NY: Harper and Row.

Heath, S., & Mangiola, L. (1991). *Children of promise: Literate activity in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms*. Washington D. C.: National Education Association.

Juel, C. (1996). What makes literacy tutoring effective: *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*, 268-289.

Labbo, L., & Teale, W. (1990). Cross-age reading: A strategy for helping poor readers. *The Reading Teachers, 43*, 362-369.

Lyons, C., & Griffiths, C. (1995). *Exploring AmeriCorps Members' changing perceptions of learning and teaching while participating in a national service program to promote math and literacy for young children*. Paper presented at the 1995 National Reading Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Morrow, L., & Walker, B. (1998*). The reading team: A handbook for volunteer tutors, K-3.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Pinnell, G., & Griffiths, C. (1996). *Assessing the impact of AmeriCorps for math literacy into urban schools*. Paper presented at the 1996 National Reading Conference Annual Meeting, Charleston, SC.

Topping, K. (1987). Peer tutoring paired reading: Outcome data from ten projects. *Educational Psychology, 7*, 133- 145.

Wasik, B. (1997). Volunteer tutoring programs: Do we know what works? *Phi Delta Kappan, 79*, 282-287.

Wasik, B., & Slavin, R.(1993). Preventing early reading failure with one-to-one tutoring: A review of five programs. *Reading Research Quarterly, 28*, 178-200.

Woo, D., & Morrow, M. (1998). *The effects of "America Reads" tutoring on achievement and attitude of children.* Paper presented at the 1998 National Reading Conference, Austin, TX.